From Tyre to Tehran: Transnational Links Amongst Lebanese Shi'a Clerical Families

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ABSTRACT: The contemporary Western view of Lebanese Shi'a transnational links generally focuses on the political relationship between Hizbullah and Iran. However, while Lebanon and Iran have historical links, Lebanese Shi'a transnational links are not limited to Iran. In particular, the relationship between Lebanese and Iraqi Shi'a has been of great significance amongst the elite clerical families; however, this link has been little examined. Due to the extended periods of time spent by Lebanese in Iraq to acquire the knowledge necessary to return to Lebanon and teach the religious sciences, Lebanese religious students sometimes married into the families of their Iraqi teachers, or members of other Lebanese clerical families in Iraq, and on occasion became representatives for their Najafi mentors. Some members of these extended Lebanese families never returned to their country of origin and remained in Iraq, or in at least one notable case moved to Iran. These links have proved resilient over time, but the opaque nature of these interpersonal connections has disguised the depth of the ties that some traditional Lebanese Shi'a families retain with Iraq.

KEYWORDS: Lebanon, Shi'a, Iraq, Iran, *hawzah*

Introduction

Lebanon's weak political institutions and patchwork of sectarian groups has meant that the country has constantly been at the mercy of powerful external forces, as communities welcomed foreign support to protect or advance their communal interests. Whether it has been French assistance to the Maronite Christians, Syrian support for all groups intermittently

in order to ensure that no single group became too powerful, or more recently Saudi Arabian support for Sunni political interests, external involvement has been a fact of life in the Lebanese Republic since its official establishment in 1943. Despite the plethora of foreign actors in Lebanon, the external link that attracts most interest is the one between Iran and the Shi'a community. Such has been the focus on Iranian activities in Lebanon that from the time Hizbullah emerged in the early 1980s, its much-publicized political, ideological and religious relationship with Iran has dominated popular Western perceptions regarding the nature of Lebanese Shi'a transnational links.

The reality is that while Iran may figure most prominently in Western public perceptions, there have been historically deep inter-communal bonds with Iraq, centred to a large degree on the traditional clerical families. These links should come as no surprise given the historical attraction of scholars to Najaf, the relative ease of living and studying in an Arabic-speaking country, the attendant requirement for years (and in many cases decades) of study and residency required to master the intricacies of Ja'fari jurisprudence and the consequent marriage of prominent Lebanese students with the daughters of Iraqi scholars. There are even claims, admittedly somewhat tenuous, that Najaf/'Amili juristic cooperation dates as far back as the occultation of the twelfth Imam in the tenth century CE.[1]

That is not to downplay the historical reality of Lebanese-Iranian links. Conventional wisdom says that they began as early as the beginning of the sixteenth century, although – as with the claims about Iraq – some argue that links between the two countries predate this by several centuries.[2] There is no doubt however, that the Safavid dynasty, which proclaimed Shi'ism as the official religion of Iran after their accession to power in the sixteenth century, invited Shi'a scholars from throughout the Muslim world to take up senior positions in the religious hierarchy of the Persian Empire. There was a need to provide teachers of the new religious creed, and the size of the task required the input of scholars from all the Shi'a centres of learning to teach the essential elements of Shi'a jurisprudence, establish structures for educating future generations of scholars, and to act as *qadi*s (judges) for the practice of Ja'fari law. These Shi'a scholars included several from Jabal 'Amil in what is now southern Lebanon and what was then a highly regarded centre of scholarly thought.

But bilateral linkages take many forms; from purely ephemeral

transactional linkages that can be found in the myriad of commercial exchanges that take place throughout the region every day, through modern-day strategic political connections to the deep, historical links that bind families together throughout the Muslim world. It is sometimes difficult to separate one from the other given the degree of overlap that may occur. However in order to better understand the complex web of relations that shape relations between elements of the Lebanese Shi'a community and their co-religionists elsewhere in the region, it is beneficial to look at the way in which influential families' connections transcend national boundaries.

This paper contributes to our understanding of transnational linkages amongst the Lebanese Shi'a by going beyond the well-documented links with Iran to look at the way in which ties with Iraq have bound elements of the Shi'a populations of the two countries on a number of levels. Despite its critical connection to Shi'a history and its traditional role as the focus of religious study, there has been surprisingly little written about the connections between Iraqi Shi'a and their co-religionists in Lebanon. Given the historical prominence of Iraq as the natural home for Shi'a jurists, the appropriate vehicle for such an examination is an influential sub-element of the Lebanese community: traditional clerical families. Five prominent Lebanese Shi'a families were chosen as a representative sample: the Fadlallah, Charafeddine, Shamseddine, al-Amine, and Sadek families.[3]

Because of their long history and their tradition of juridical study outside Lebanon, these families are representative of the traditional paths taken by Lebanese clerical families. They also provide a good sample of the experiences that have shaped the relationships between and amongst such traditional families. There are, of course, challenges with such an approach. While familial lineages amongst such a group are normally very well documented, it is impossible to cover all of the complex linkages that have been established. The paucity of written records and consequent need to rely on oral histories, as well as polygamous practices and large families combine to make the task of clearly establishing the existence, let alone measuring the strength of such links an extremely difficult if not impossible task. As an indication of the size of the task involved, one of the Charafeddine interlocutors indicated that he had 65 first cousins, while it was claimed that the documented Fadlallah family tree would measure 15 metres if laid out.

The Lebanese Shi'a and Iran

It is commonly accepted that people of Lebanese origin assisted in the propagation of Shi'ism in Safavid Iran,[4] although the nature of the relationship that emerged as a consequence is contested. There are differing accounts as to why 'Amili jurists went to Iran, and the way in which they viewed their hosts once they lived with them. Even amongst those who advocate a theory of Lebanese scholarly migration from the earliest days of the Safavids, there are contemporary accounts that indicate at least some 'Amili scholars thought their Persian hosts lacked the knowledge and morality that they were accustomed to.[5] Newman even argues that this narrative of a rapid influx of scholars from the broader Shi'a world is incorrect. He argues that for at least the first half-century, scholars from the Arab Shi'a communities in Jabal 'Amil, Bahrain, and al-Ahsa were opposed to the Safavid embrace of Shi'ism due to the 'abrupt conversion' to Shi'ism of Shah Isma'il, the founder of the Safavid dynasty, as well as 'the Safawids' consistently extreme, unorthodox religious discourse, the Safawid hierarchy's lack of interest in and understanding of the doctrines and practices of the faith, and [...] the uncertainty of the future of the Safawid polity.'[6]

Regardless of these differences, there is no doubt that Lebanese did come and take up places of some significance in the religious hierarchy, helped no doubt by the often generous concessions the rulers accorded them as well as the intermittent persecution they suffered in the Arab world under Ottoman rule. The prominence of Lebanese scholars within the broader Shi'a world was not to last forever though. The late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries are considered the high point in Lebanon's scholarly reputation as a result of the quality and quantity of scholars it produced. Prominent *hawzahs* had been established in Jabal 'Amil and the western Biqa' (Bekaa) Valley, the most well-known at Karak Nuh (allegedly a shrine built over the tomb of Noah, and from where the well-known Lebanese jurist of the early Safavid court Nur al-Din 'Ali ibn Husayn al-Karak emerged)[7]. The subsequent decline was partly due to the irregular persecution that the community suffered at the hands of the Ottoman rulers (constant competitors of the Safavids), particularly during the late eighteenth century tutelage of Ahmad al-Jazzar (the butcher). Financial means to support scholars declined and, given the economic deprivation that much of the Shi'a community experienced, a scholarly career became

harder to justify. The decline of the Safavid Empire from the start of the eighteenth century further limited the opportunities for Lebanese scholars to pursue influential, and in some cases lucrative scholarly careers. The Safavid decline and decreasing attraction and influence of scholarship in Jabal 'Amil did not entirely break Lebanese-Persian links, but those links were considerably weakened.

This centuries-old connection between the two countries, while real and for some elements of the Lebanese Shi'a community a defining feature, can however be accorded more importance than it deserves. The post-revolutionary Iranian Shi'a activist model led some to emphasize Lebanese-Iranian links as a way of justifying a close political relationship even if in reality it was much less than it appeared.[8] Hizbullah adopts a particular approach to the historiography of Lebanese-Iranian links that suits their contemporary political agenda. The reality of such links however, is somewhat different. During the rule of the Shah for example, Iran paid scant attention to Lebanon's Shi'a community. The Shah did visit in 1957 at the invitation of the then Lebanese President Camille Chamoun. The pro-Western Chamoun was cultivating Tehran's support with a view to engineering Lebanon's possible entry into the anti-communist Baghdad Pact. While the Shah met Shi'a members of parliament, his studied indifference, if not hostility towards Shi'a Islam,[9] as well as his opposition to supporters of the Arab nationalist cause meant that he had no inclination to play on whatever notions of historical communal fraternity between Iran and the Lebanese Shi'a that existed.

Indeed, the Shah's attempts to meet with 'Abd al-Husayn Charafeddine, the pre-eminent Lebanese Shi'a cleric of the day, during his visit to Lebanon came to nought. Charafeddine refused to meet the Shah for two reasons: because the cleric was expected to travel to meet the Shah, thereby signalling his subservience, as well as the fact that Charafeddine felt that Sayyid Abu al-Qasim Kashani (who had spent 15 months in exile in Lebanon) was being persecuted by the Shah.[10] Although substantive political links between Lebanon and Iran remained at low levels until the early 1980s,[11] Iran was to be the source of the most influential Lebanese Shi'a political leader of the modern era. Imam Musa Sadr arrived from Iran to Tyre in 1959, and was able to develop the community into a politically active and expressive minority from their former subservience to a politically influential group of traditional leaders.[12] At the same time Musa Sadr also became an exemplar for

future, more aggressively assertive Shi'a clerical leadership. Despite his disappearance in 1978, he remains highly respected amongst all elements of the Lebanese Shi'a community.

Historiography of Lebanese clerical nisbahs

Examining the development of the *nisbahs*[13] of these families is important not only from an historical perspective for the insight it gives into some of the challenges faced by Arab Shi'a throughout history, but also for the way in which it allows us to understand the way in which families are linked even if such relationships are not readily apparent. Most *nisbahs* are relatively recent appellations, and the manner in which they developed relies nearly exclusively on oral histories. These histories, regardless of the lack of documentation, are nevertheless invaluable in aiding our understanding of the complex relationships that link influential families to both places and other families.

The family of the late Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah for example, traces its origins to Mecca and a relative who, as a result of the *hajj*, made friends with families from Jabal 'Amil, particularly those from the town of 'Aynata in southern Lebanon (now adjacent to the Israeli border). The distant relative was enticed, most likely through an offer of a teaching position, to move from Mecca to 'Aynata and eventually married into the local population. The current Fadlallah family is directly descended from a Fadlallah al-Hasani who ceased using the name al-Hasani some 150 years ago (most likely to limit the visibility of identifiably Shi'a names during one of the periodic purges of the Shi'a population) and started referring to themselves simply by the name Fadlallah. Other branches of this family took on the *nisbah* al-Husayni and eventually settled around Ba'albak.[14] The Charafeddine family also took a similar path in arriving at the current form of their family name. Having descended from one Charafeddine Abu al-Hasan, all reference to the second Imam Hasan disappeared several hundred years ago, allegedly to protect the ancestor's Shi'a identity from the Ottoman authorities. As a consequence the family simply became known simply by the *nisbah* Charafeddine. One branch of the Charafeddines was to establish themselves in Najaf sometime in the eighteenth century and a century later relocated to Qum.

The *nisbah* of another very famous Lebanese clerical family, the Shamseddines, also emerged as a consequence of the historical antipathy between the branches of Islam. The family is descended from the fourteenth century scholar Muhammad ibn Makki al-Jizzini who was known colloquially by the name Shamseddine in recognition of his scholarly standing. He was jailed in Damascus as a result of a conflict with the Mamluk governor, accused of conspiracy with a foreign power, and was eventually put to death. One branch of the family took on his commonly used colloquial name out of respect for their martyred kinsman, and has retained the name since that time.[15]

The centuries-old migration of family groups from Lebanon to Iran and Iraq, and sometimes back again with the associated intermarriage and modification to the *nisbah*, has added to the aforementioned difficulty in establishing families' connections and tracking their antecedents. The al-Amine family is a good example of how members of these clerical families have established sub-branches in countries through which they have travelled for study or juristic duties. As best is known, the family originated in Najaf, but sometime in the seventeenth century, a member of the family moved to Shaqra' in southern Lebanon to teach in a *madrasah*. This branch of the family became established in Shaqra', while others moved to different areas of Lebanon, including Majdal Selem (Majd al-Silm) where they remain to this day.[16]

But the links with Najaf also remained strong as members of the al-Amine family moved back to Najaf to undertake higher juridical study. Some of these members married whilst there and eventually settled in Najaf, where the family had originated. An Iraqi branch of the al-Amines subsequently developed in Najaf coming to be known by the name 'Amili, reflecting their Lebanese antecedents. The Lebanese al-Amines and the Iraqi 'Amilis maintain regular contact to this day.[17] The Charafeddine family also retains a close association with other sub-branches of the family, whose linkages are not immediately apparent given the geographic separation and different *nisbah*s that have emerged over the centuries. That element of the Charafeddine family that moved to Najaf in the eighteenth century led by Sayyid Salih Charafeddine for example, eventually changed its *nisbah* to al-Sadr, allegedly at the request of the pre-eminent *'alim* of his day, Mirza Hasan Shirazi, in order to differentiate Isma'il Charafeddine (Salih's grandson and Imam Musa's grandfather) from another of Shirazi's students named Isma'il.[18] Isma'il's

son, Sadr al-Din eventually moved to Qum thereby establishing the Iranian branch of the Charafeddine family.

Bonds through religious study

As the traditional centre of Shi'a Islamic jurisprudence, Najaf has served as the meeting place for religious scholars from around the Shi'a world. In addition to hosting the tomb of Imam 'Ali and Wadi al-Salam, the holiest of burial sites for the Shi'a faithful, the construction of the Hindiyyah canal in the late eighteenth century gave it a water supply and allowed it to sustain a large population. Lebanese clerical families established strong links with the city and also with non-Lebanese people there with whom they shared much of their time as students and/or teachers. Many of the senior Lebanese ulema were born in Najaf, as a consequence of their *'alim* fathers' extended periods of study in the city. The decades that members of these families spent in Najaf goes a long way to explain the depth of relationships that formed between extended families despite the distance that may separate them.

The renowned jurist Muhammad Mahdi Shamseddine, for example, arrived in Najaf to study in 1948 as a twelve-year-old and did not return to Lebanon on a permanent basis until 1968. Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah's father, Sayyid 'Abd al-Ra'uf, moved from Bint Jbail in South Lebanon to Najaf in 1927 and did not return until 1955.[19] During this time Sayyid Muhammad Husayn was born and lived for his first 30 years in Najaf, not returning to Lebanon until 1966.[20] Sayyid 'Abd al-Husayn Charafeddine was also born in Najaf in 1873, and returned for a period to Lebanon when he was eight before moving back to Najaf to study between the ages of 18 and 30. He returned to Shuhur in Lebanon in the early twentieth century before relocating to Tyre in 1908 to teach at the request of the local Shi'a community.[21]

Conversely, Iran was little used by Lebanon's traditional Shi'a scholarly families. Indeed until recent times, Iran was a minor destination for clerical training amongst Lebanese Shi'a. This included those Lebanese Shi'a students from outside the traditional clerical families; prior to the Iranian Revolution there were fewer than ten Lebanese students studying in Qum, but these numbers ballooned to over 450 after the Revolution.[22] That number began to decline not long after the Revolution, but for

more prosaic reasons. Entry to Qum had, until 1990 been competitive based on entrance exams administered in Beirut. Since then however, entry has required sponsorship by, or affiliation with Hizbullah, who have also provided some financial assistance.[23]

Most of these students are from outside the traditional Lebanese scholarly milieu, and could expect to use their studies to become lower-level clerics or for more politico-religious purposes rather than as professional scholars intent on building up a body of work sufficient to rise up the clerical ranks.[24] While a family lineage is not a prerequisite for the attainment of high clerical status, one's familial origins can make a substantial difference. It remains to be seen whether any of the new wave of Hizbullah-sponsored Qum students can rise to a level of scholarship that would allow them to develop a tradition of advanced scholarship sufficient to compete with the more established families. Regardless of whether this occurs, the resources of Hizbullah do count, and Sayyid Shamseddine was forced to close his *hawzah* as students were attracted away by Hizbullah.[25]

The holy cities in Iraq have been preferred over Iran by the Lebanese scholarly class for a number of reasons. Some of the families interviewed offered rather prosaic reasons for this trend, such as the tendency of most of the teachers in Iran to instruct in Farsi. For those who did teach in Arabic, there was a belief that the standard of language was not as good as that in Najaf. Some caution needs to be exercised in accepting opinions such as these at face value, as it is likely a certain degree of bias exists. All of the noted clerics in the families interviewed had been long-term students in Najaf and they were all in agreement that Najaf was the superior location for Shi'a juristic study. They attributed this to the centrality of the location to Shi'a history; the length of time the *hawzah* had been established; the broader international appeal it had, evidenced by the number of countries its students came from (although Qum has certainly sought to internationalise its student body in recent years); that its graduates tended to the higher ranks in greater numbers; and that its teaching methodology emphasized a deeper understanding of jurisprudence than that offered in Qum. An unwillingness to countenance the quality of Iranian scholarship was evident in the view of one senior scholar that no matter how highly ranked an Iranian scholar was, he must spend some time in Najaf. The obvious (but unstated) implication was that the reverse did not hold true.

Qum did become a centre of learning for a number of the senior Lebanese clerics as well as many other Arab Shi'a following the expulsion of all foreign students from the Najafi *hawzah* by Saddam Husayn in 1978. There was little option for those who wished to continue their studies other than to move across the border and find a more accommodating scholastic environment in Iran. Although the clerics were grateful for the opportunity Iran afforded them during this period, such a move was considered temporary for number of reasons, including the feeling that Arab students were not treated in the same manner as Iranians. Sayyid 'Ali al-Amine was one of those affected and he spent three years studying and teaching in Qum during the early 1980s. Shaykh 'Abd al-Amir Shamseddine, a future representative of Grand Ayatollah 'Ali al-Sistani in Lebanon, also moved to Qum after being imprisoned in Iraq during Saddam Husayn's rule.[26] Now that the conditions are more propitious for scholars in Iraq, it is rare among traditional Lebanese Shi'a families that members choose to study in Qum, although there are some members of these extended families who have done so.

The linkages formed at the *hawzah* naturally extend well beyond the fraternity borne of common scholastic endeavour. For peers, there was the opportunity to establish links with like-minded scholars and by doing so, find possible future allies. More importantly from a reputational perspective, there was the potential to make an impression on the senior *mujtahids* who taught jurisprudence, in order to set a path from where they could be recommended for a scholarly position or perhaps even appointed the representative of a particular *marja'*. In a society where tradition matters, the interaction between families over decades, and in some case hundreds of years has made for extremely strong bonds. As well as the ancestral links already mentioned, this bonding through education is another way in which the Lebanese Charafeddine family has formed close relations with the al-Sadr family. Shaykh Yusuf Charafeddine ('Abd al-Husayn's father), for example, was taught by Sayyid Isma'il al-Sadr (the grandfather of Muhammad Baqir and Imam Musa al-Sadr, and the great-great grandfather of Muqtada al-Sadr) during the eighteenth century. In turn, Isma'il al-Sadr's son Sadr al-Din al-Sadr (Imam Musa Sadr's father) was taught by 'Abd al-Husayn Charafeddine (d. 1958).

Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah provides a more contemporary example of the way in which traditional Lebanese scholarly families have interacted with their co-religionists in Iraq. Fadlallah studied at the

most advanced levels under the pre-eminent *maraji'* of his day, including Sayyid Abu al-Qasim al-Khu'i and Sayyid Muhsin al-Hakim[27]. His time in Najaf brought him into the orbit of Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, who became a close friend, as well as Muhammad Mahdi al-Hakim (son of Sayyid Muhsin) with whom he collaborated in the writing of literature magazines.[28] Despite his close relationship with Baqir al-Sadr, his actual relationship with Hizb al-Da'wah has never been clear. Although it was claimed that he was never a member,[29] his close association with its leaders[30] and intellectual input he provided into the concept of scholarly-led political activism no doubt assisted in the formation of the political movement subsequently created by the young Najafi ulema. This would have direct consequences for the Shi'a community in Lebanon, given that several of the founding members of Hizbullah were Lebanese members of Hizb al-Da'wah.

The Najaf/Hizb al-Da'wah connection also involved another prominent Lebanese Shi'a *'alim*, Muhammad Mahdi Shamseddine. He too returned to Lebanon with a political view heavily influenced by his Iraqi connections. Having been a contemporary of Fadlallah's, he studied under al-Khu'i and Muhsin al-Hakim and also had close relations with Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr during his time in Najaf. Shamseddine was appointed as Hakim's representative in Lebanon and in southern Iraq around Diwaniyyah.[31] He shared the idea that clerics should play an active political role but was more pragmatic about its nature in the case of Lebanon. As a consequence he sought more formalized community leadership positions, eventually leading the Higher Islamic Shi'a Council (an institution first headed by Musa Sadr).

Marriage links

There is a logical connection between the close religious and educational bonds formed between and amongst traditional Shi'a clerical families, and their predisposition to inter-marriage. Some families are keen to maintain familial links with Lebanon and, even while in Najaf, they may seek partners from other expatriate Lebanese families. In addition, the length of time that students study in Najaf under certain *mujtahids* means that close relationships between teacher and pupil develop, sometimes leading to the marriage of the pupil to a teacher's daughter.

Such an act signifies the mutual respect that each holds for the other (and on occasion the desire of either or both parties to establish strategic alliances). As a consequence, most Lebanese Shi'a clerical families are linked by marriage to other Lebanese or, sometimes, to Iraqi families. The dearth of Lebanese students in the Iranian *hawzah* means that it is much less common for such links to exist with Iranian families.

Sayyid Fadlallah was a good example of the way in which marriages could be arranged with either a view to maintaining contact with, or alliances within home districts or as a way of clerical families in Najaf cementing ties with promising scholars through marriage to their daughters. Fadlallah's father lived in Najaf for more than 30 years, and as a consequence of these intricate marriage patterns amongst long-term Najafi scholars, Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah was related to the famous Iraqi jurist Sayyid Muhsin al-Hakim through al-Hakim's marriage to Fadlallah's maternal aunt.[32] But despite, or perhaps even because of the Fadlallah family's many years in Najaf, they were also keen to maintain strong links to Lebanon. Ayatollah Fadlallah recounted how his grandfather had married the daughter of Jawad Murtada,[33] while his grandmother came from another distinguished scholarly family, the Mughniyyahs. In addition, Fadlallah's mother was the daughter of Hajj Hasan Bazzi, a member of the prominent political family from Bint Jbail.[34]

This pattern of intermarriage within clerical families at the same time as maintaining links with Lebanon was repeated elsewhere. Indeed, there are strong marital links between many of the families interviewed. The al-Amines and the Shamseddines illustrate the way in which these strong links have emerged: Sayyid 'Ali al-Amine is married to the sister of Shaykh Muhammad Mahdi Shamseddine, who was in turn married to a member of the al-Amines. Shaykh Muhammad's son Ibrahim (a former non-parliamentary cabinet member and president of the charitable foundation established in memory of his father) is also married to a member of the al-Amine family.[35] Amongst other families interviewed, the al-Sadek family from Nabatiyyah had close ties with the Charafeddines (in the past, four daughters of 'Abd al-Husayn Sadek married sons of 'Abd al-Husayn Charafeddine),[36] even though Shaykh 'Abd al-Husayn Sadek is himself married to an Iraqi.

The Charafeddine family stands out as an exception to the normal intra-Lebanese or Iraqi inter-marriages amongst the traditional clerical families. As discussed previously, the Charafeddines have strong ancestral

links with Iran, largely through the al-Sadr branch of the extended family. But this relationship has been at the personal and scholarly level, independent of pre- or post-revolutionary Iranian politics. This long-standing personal relationship also explains why Musa Sadr was invited from Iran to Lebanon to take up the position of *'alim* of Tyre following the death of the incumbent Sayyid 'Abd al-Husayn Charafeddine.[37] Even closer bonds were forged between the families once Musa Sadr arrived, and it was unsurprising that Musa Sadr's sister Rabab married Husayn Charafeddine (son of 'Abd al-Husayn) and settled in Tyre.[38] The present generation has carried on this tradition, with Qusay Charafeddine married to Imam Musa Sadr's daughter Malihah. This close connection with the Iranian al-Sadrs however, should not hide the fact that the Charafeddines have traditionally had, and still retain, strong familial connections within Lebanon.

Whilst the links between the Lebanese Shi'a and their co-religionists in Iran are currently substantial and of long standing, there is the potential to overestimate their depth. Financial and technical assistance to Hizbullah, as well as the provision of scholarships to assist those undertaking clerical study to choose Qum as their destination, certainly assists connections with Iran to develop amongst those who receive such assistance. However there are also elements of the Lebanese Shi'a population who do not directly benefit from this largesse and consequently have little regard for Iranian interests. Amongst the historically significant clerical families of Lebanon, deep scholastic or familial relations with Iran are rare. With a few relatively minor exceptions of some less influential members of the learned families, the main transnational links amongst the traditional scholarly families remain with Najaf. This is hardly surprising given the attraction of the Najafi *hawzah* to seriously minded jurists, and the consequent time spent there to gain the requisite qualifications and form the linkages necessary for further employment and/or advancement. The linkages that emerged amongst the Shi'a clerical elite were both private (largely through marriage) and intellectual (through decades of studying and interacting with the leading clerics of the day).

This is not to discount the depth or longevity of Lebanese Shi'a relations with Iran. The early influence of Lebanese scholars on the nascent Safavid dynasty and the influence of the Iranian-born and educated Imam Musa Sadr on the Lebanese Shi'a community are well-known. And contemporary Shi'a political discourse is often overshadowed by

the relationship of Hizbullah with its Iranian backers. The Iranian-Lebanese Shi'a connection has significant limitations though. Amongst the traditional Lebanese Shi'a clerical class, with the exception of the Charafeddine family, deep links are rare. The transnational linkages established by and between the traditional religious families, often with Iraqi Shi'a, are much deeper and of significantly longer standing, and yet are much less public or understood.

How influential these substantial Iraqi-Lebanese Shi'a links will prove to be in the future remains yet to be determined. The post-Saddam Shi'a majority government in Baghdad certainly makes it conducive to study in the ancient cities of learning. It remains to be seen however, whether clerics of the stature and influence of Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah, 'Abd al-Husayn Charafeddine, or Muhammad Mahdi Shamseddine will continue to exert the type of influence amongst the Shi'a community that they have in the past. The alternative may be that less learned, but more politically influential pro-Iranian clerics such as Hasan Nasrallah will represent the future. But in a country where history, both real and imagined, plays such an important role, the respect accorded to those with strong traditional links to the historically important centres of learning should not be underestimated.

Notes

1 Rula Abisaab 'Shi'ite Beginnings and Scholastic Tradition in Jabal 'Amil in Lebanon', in *The Muslim World*, vol. 89, no. 1 (1999), 9.

2 Roschanak Shaery-Eisenlohr, *Shi'ite Lebanon: Transnational Religion and the Making of National Identitites* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 162.

3 For the purposes of this paper, the common usage transliteration of the surnames has been used, e.g. Shamseddine instead of Shams al-Din.

4 The background to this scholarly connection in its earliest days is well covered in Rula Abisaab's *Converting Persia* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004).

5 Devin J. Stewart, 'An Episode in the 'Amili Migration to Safavid Iran: Husayn b. 'Abd al-Samad al-'Amili's Travel Account', in *Iranian Studies*, vol. 39, no. 4 (2006), 504.

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7 Albert Hourani 'From Jabal 'Amil to Persia', in *Bulletin of the School of African and Oriental Studies*, vol. 49, no. 1 (1986), 134

8 Roschanak Shaery-Eisenlohr, 'Post-Revolutionary Iran and Shi'i Lebanon: Contested Histories', in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 39, no. 2 (2007).

9 H. E. Chehabi & Rula Abisaab, *Distant Relations: Iran and Lebanon in the Last 500*

Years (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 28.

[10] Telephone interview with Ra'id Charafeddine (grandson of 'Abd al-Husayn Charafeddine), 9 October 2012.

[11] Although Iran was the first country to provide forces to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in 1978.

[12] This is extensively covered by Fuad Ajami in his book *The Vanished Imam: Musa al-Sadr and the Shi'a of Lebanon* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1986).

[13] In Arabic, the *nisbah* is analogous to the surname, and can be reflective of one's occupation, home location, or tribal/familial descent.

[14] Author's interview with Husayn Fadlallah (nephew of Sayyid Fadlallah), Beirut, 2 June 2008.

[15] Author's interview with Ibrahim Shamseddine, Beirut, 2 June 2008, and e-mail 14 September 2012.

[16] Author's interview with Sayyid 'Ali al-Amine, Beirut, 1 June 2008.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Husayn Muhammad Gharbieh, *Political Awareness of the Shi'ites in Lebanon: the Role of Sayyid 'Abd al-Husain Sharaf al-Din and Sayyid Musa al-Sadr* [PhD thesis], Durham University, 1996, 142. <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/1521/> Accessed 2 November 2012.

[19] Jamal Sankari, *Fadlallah: the Making of a Radical Shi'ite Leader* (London: Saqi Books, 2005), 46-8.

[20] Gharbieh, *Political Awareness of the Shi'ites in Lebanon*, 131.

[21] Interview with Husayn Charafeddine (son of 'Abd al-Husayn), Tyre, June 2008.

[22] Chehabi & Abisaab, *Distant Relations*, 243.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Author's interview with Shaykh 'Abd al-Husayn Sadek, Nabatiyyah, 31 May 2008.

[25] Rula Jurdi Abisaab, 'Lebanese Shi'ites and the *Marja'iyya*: Polemic in the Late Twentieth Century', in *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 36, no. 2, (2009), 237.

[26] Author's interview with Ibrahim Shamseddine.

[27] Sankari, *Fadlallah*, 47. Of note is the claim that the familial roots of the al-Hakim (Arabic for 'the wise', or 'doctor') are from Jabal 'Amil where one of Sayyid Muhsin's forebears had been a noted doctor – e-mail from Ibrahim Shamseddine, 14 September 2012.

[28] The role of Najaf as a centre of scholarly political discourse at this time, including reference to Fadlallah's occasional participation in it, is well covered by Chibli Mallat in *The Renewal of Islamic Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993)

[29] Sankari, *Fadlallah*, 76.

[30] Laurence Louer, *Transnational Shia Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 109.

[31] E-mail from Ibrahim Shamseddine, 14 September 2012.

[32] Author's interview with Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah, Haret Hreik, Beirut, June 2008.

[33] The Murtada family was a famous Shi'a family that stretched between Ba'albak and Damascus and supervised the shrine at Karak Nuh in the Biqa' as well as, since the 14th century, the shrine of Sayyidah Zaynab in Damascus. See Stefan Winter, *The Shiites of Lebanon Under Ottoman Rule 1516-1788* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 29.

[34] Author's interview with Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah.

[35] Author's interview with Ibrahim Shamseddine.

[36] Author's interview with Shaykh 'Abd al-Husayn Sadek.

[37] Augustus Richard Norton, *Amal and the Shi'a: Struggle for the Soul of Lebanon* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), 39.

[38] Another of Musa Sadr's sisters, Mansurah, is the mother-in-law of former Iranian president Muhammad Khatami.